

The Deleglise Cabin: The Origins of Antigo



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Preface

The foundations of this paper were first written in 1988 by Julie Blazek, then a student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Urban Planning and Architecture School, for a class entitled *American Vernacular Architecture*, taught by Thomas Hubka. Julie was raised in Antigo and was fascinated by the cabin as a young child. She was asked to give a presentation on this paper to the Langlade County Historical Society in 1989.



In 2008, she and Joe Hermolin, a member of the Board of Directors of the Langlade Historical Society, worked together to add more detail and history to the original work to create this document. Julie's father, Dean Blazek, a long-time board member of the Historical Society, was involved in the efforts to preserve and move the cabin for visitors to see, wanted to make this information available to anyone who wished to have it. Free electronic and hard copies are available upon request.

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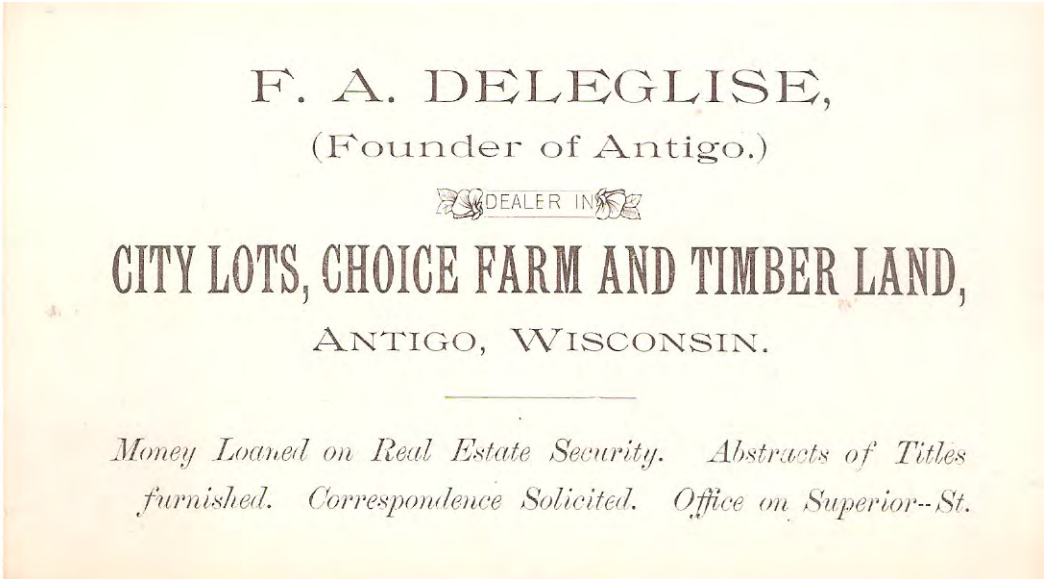
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Francis Deleglise Business Card

Introduction

Wisconsin's rich heritage and pioneer tradition remains deep within the spirits of the people who have participated in its cultural development. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the small communities of northern Wisconsin, whose townsmen take great pride in their long, illustrious histories. Antigo is one such community, located in Langlade County, where one wastes little time finding a willing soul volunteering information about the town's beginnings; romanticized or otherwise. And indeed, this little village's history is a storybook tale of courageous pioneering and strong community support.

Even the first cabin ever built on this settlement still stands, repaired and refurbished, on the town's former library grounds (and now the home of the Langlade County Historical Museum), merely a few blocks from its original location. The Langlade County Historical Society, as well as local residents, have taken great measures to insure the preservation of such valuable artifacts. Equally important is the wealth of literature written on the city's past, carefully compiled and organized by various groups, available at a fingertip for those eager enough to open the files on this community's vast heritage.

The focus of this research is on the little log cabin, yet no investigation of building form can take place without a clear understanding of the people responsible for its construction, their historical background and tradition, local environmental influences, and the like. Therefore, much of this paper will devote attention to the development of Langlade County, the founding of Antigo by Francis A. Deeglise, and the pioneering of this rugged wilderness, all of which have much to do with how and why these buildings were erected.

The cabin, built by Deeglise, serves as an excellent model of building typology in northern Wisconsin during the period of its settlement. Further, the history surrounding the cabin's construction and evolution are similar to that of homesteads being built throughout the region at the time. This history, however, differs from the history of pioneer life which most Americans were taught. For example, the mention of frontier settlement conjures of images of fierce Indian confrontations, winter conditions too harsh to withstand, and "Lincoln-log" type homes. These concepts, when tested against model situations like Antigo's, are most likely found untrue.

Therefore, we wish to establish the growth of Antigo and Langlade County as a paradigm of northern Wisconsin expansion; and demonstrate that the heritage of

early settlement often conflicts with preconceived notions of America's westward movement.

Settlement of Langlade County

Langlade County, founded by Squire A. Taylor in 1879, lies geographically in the center of the state¹. It was named in honor of Sieur Charles De Langlade, heralded as Wisconsin's first settler of partial European descent, who settled near Green Bay. Langlade County's dense, virgin forests were scouted by an influx of timber estimators, lumbermen, prospectors, and homestead seekers in the mid-19th century. The Old Military road, established in the 1860's, was the only clearing among the towering basswood, maple, birch, and elm. The lack of roads was merely one of the hardships which faced these early pioneers. The journey was tiresome and tedious, and for all their endeavors, none of these initial explorers remained to establish permanent settlements.

It is important to note that during the time of early Wisconsin settlement the native Indians in the area were generally friendly. Images of savage and cruel Indians often were misconceptions; initial resistance to give over their lands did prove bloody, yet white settlement soon dethroned the natives and the two began to share the wilderness. At the time of Antigo's founding, Indian relations were peaceful. Settlers traded with the natives and often married young Indians maidens. In fact, by the early 1900's, the federal government was building log cabins along the Embarrass River to encourage the Indians to abandon their wigwams².

The first white settler in the county was W. L. Ackley, who erected a small cabin on the banks of the Eau Claire River in the 1850's. The county's seat was later staked by F. A. Deleglise in the valley of the Eau Claire, known today as the Antigo Flats. There lies an area of heavily timbered land to the east of what was known as the "hills." Deleglise diligently surveyed the land and proceeded to persuade new families to immigrate to the area. Those who came were indeed diverse, including Czechoslovakians, Germans, English, and Poles. They proceeded to build homesteads, clear farmlands, and develop some of the most productive, fertile soils in the state.

"...until 1855; Langlade County was a paradise of nature, unmarred by the wood- man's axe; a virgin forest where God's cattle fed 'upon a thousand hills;' where streams and glacial lakes abounded unmolested in fish and game; a country where the melodious warble of the feathered songster intermingled with the soft sigh of the great pine."³

“Since 1855 its area has been gradually, but surely developed into an important and essential part of the great commonwealth of Wisconsin. From the day when the squatters and early homesteaders pushed back the forest from an acre or more of ground, new land has been constantly cleared, broken or drained from year to year.”⁴

Today Langlade County is home to a great diversity of industry and occupation. It was established as an agricultural region, leading the state in dairying production and potato cultivation. But perhaps its greatest claim is as the “Gateway to the North,” a land welcoming traveler anxious to fish its glistening lakes and streams and track game through its primeval forests.

The majority of early emigrants settled in southern Wisconsin, in the region around Mineral Point and between Madison and Milwaukee. The building forms found there are more diverse than those found to the north, mainly because they either benefitted from better technology or have simply been replaced with different structures.

The first crude shacks built here by settlers dotted the vast forest area. The pioneer cabins were often separated by miles of forest, except in a few areas where two or three families would group together. These homesteaders were very hospitable and cordial, offering a helping hand to those in need of raising a cabin. They located their sites near rivers, lakes, and rich soils where vast amounts of lumber were available. The Indians usually burned the country over in the spring or fall, hence the large oak timbers needed for building could only be found in certain finely protected spots. Settlers felled the trees and dragged them by oxen to their sites. Once started, these homes took only a few days to erect, and the family could move out from their temporary tent.

The first log cabins in upper Wisconsin were stopping places along the Lake Superior Trail and Military Road. Fishers, hunters, and land speculators frequented these resorts roughly constructed, yet very comfortable and cheerful. In effect, these log cabins played a very significant role in laying the foundation for the great progress made in opening the Langlade County area and its resources.

As settlers arrived, their first thoughts turned to providing shelter for themselves. Simple cabins, usually fourteen or sixteen feet in length were built using traditional construction techniques.

The early homes of upper Wisconsin are basically similar: log structures with minimum openings, lean-to additions, and wood shake or scooped roofs. They

were built as the most efficient means of providing shelter in an area where wood resources were prevalent. They were not defensive shelters from the Indians, as some history books infer. They served their purposes well; to shelter the family from weather conditions.

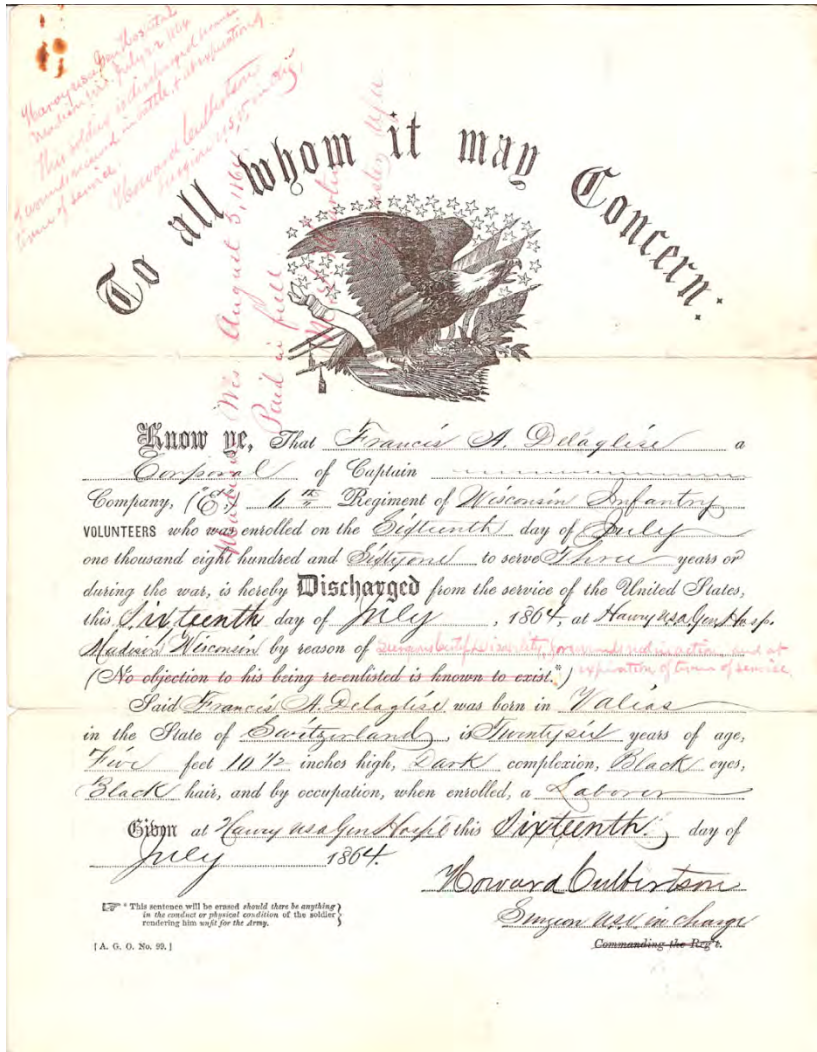
After the logs were placed into position, the roof was constructed. Gabled roofs were generally covered with wooden shingles, and pantile roofs (overlapped tiles) usually consisted of hollowed out basswood. The cracks were filled with moss, sticks, mud, and later, with lime. Blue clay mud could be found in nearby creek beds and mixed with moss and sticks it would adhere to the logs. Later, limestone was burned in a kiln, and this lime was mixed with sand and water to produce a firm plaster which performed much better than the blue mud which began to fall out when it dried.

Doors and windows were usually made with green oak timber, filling the holes axed out of the log walls. After sawmills began making rough sawn lumber available, doors, windows, and flooring were constructed with sawn boards. Roof shakes were sawed from blocks of wood about two feet long from straight grained oak logs. A draw share was then used to make them smooth to lie tight over the log rafters.

Background of the Deeglise Family

Francis A. Deeglise, unmistakably the “Father of Antigo,” is a man of illustrious history. He was born February 10, 1835, in the Commune of Baynes, Canton of Valais, Switzerland⁵. He was thirteen when his father immigrated to America and settled in southern Wisconsin. Deeglise was married near Two Rivers in 1856 to Mary Bor, a native Bohemian⁶. He answered the call of President Lincoln in the Civil War, enlisting in Appleton in 1861⁷. While fighting in one of the bloodiest battles, he was wounded at Antietam and taken prisoner. He was later rescued by Union forces and honorably discharged. He returned to his family in Manitowoc County and from there they moved to Belle Plain, Shawano County, where they farmed until his father’s death in 1878⁸.

It was after the move to Shawano County that Deeglise began surveying and cruising for timber in upper Wisconsin. For many months, this courageous pioneer would forage north on foot, eager to find new lands fit for settlement. He hired as assistant, Solomon Favinger from Indiana, to aid him in prospecting for lumber along the old trails. They often made their headquarters at the Ackley home, where Deeglise was always welcome.



Official discharge papers for Francis Deleglise signed by Dr. Culbertson who treated him in a soldiers' hospital in Madison WI for wounds he received in the Battle of Gettysburg

The dense Wisconsin forests made difficult the reading of the land, yet Deleglise instinctively detected that the Antigo Flats offered riches not found in neighboring regions. The area was flat, with rich soils created by glacial meltwater after the most recent ice age retreat 15,000 years ago.⁹

“After due consideration of all the whys and wherefores, while in Appleton in the Summer of 1876, I mapped the

present plan of Antigo and

determined upon it as the point for the Upper Eau Claire Valley.”¹⁰ It was here, in southern Langlade County, where Deleglise staked the ground, named the city, and built the first log cabin on the site.

From 1876 to 1880, Deleglise spent every daylight hour locating settlers, laying out roads, and planning his village. He brought his family to Antigo in March, 1878, where they found shelter in a small scooped roofed shack with neither door nor window. In May of the same year, Deleglise built the present log cabin with the help of several early settlers. Eight children were born to these pioneering parents, yet only five survived in this land where medical assistance did not exist, and a common cold could take a life.



Francis Deglise in the 1890's when he served in the Wisconsin state legislature



The survey crew hired by Francis Deglise once he came to Antigo. The crew included his brother (far left).

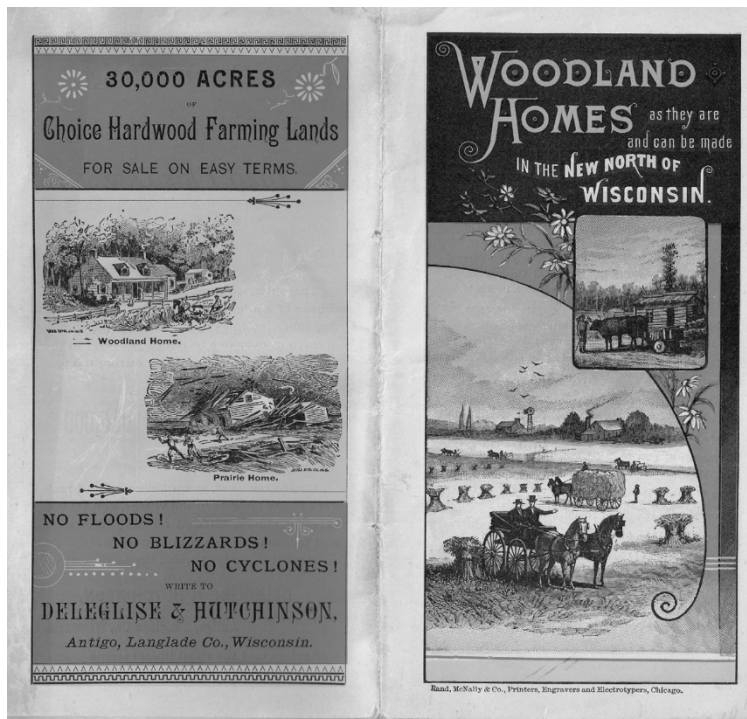
Deleglise and the Growth of Antigo

Francis Deleglise initially named his settlement Springbrook, but later renamed it after “Nequi Antigo-Seebah”, an Ojibwe Indian phrase meaning “river that flows by the balsam evergreens”.

His efforts soon turned from surveying to real estate, dividing up lots and donating sites to industrial development, churches, and business interests. He was able to convince sawmill owners to relocate to his new settlement and recruit newspaper publishers and retailers to the area. Arguably his greatest contribution was to convince the Milwaukee Lake Shore and Western Railroad to come through Antigo in its northward expansion. The Chicago and Northwestern Railroad took over the Milwaukee, Lake Shore and Western Railroads and made Antigo its division headquarters, triggering the growth of Antigo.

Deleglise was elected to the Assembly in 1892, served as Town Chairman, and was the first County Treasurer¹¹. His brilliant legislative career demonstrated his intelligence and concern for the welfare of the citizens whom he represented.

Whereas many villages began when groups of early explorers arrived, found the best sites, and settled, Antigo’s settlement is directly attributed to Deleglise’s lone persistence. Under his direction the city was founded, settled, and nurtured into an extremely productive community.



Covers to a promotional booklet produced by Deleglise and his real estate partner Hutchinson extolling the benefits of northern Wisconsin and Antigo.

Antigo's First Home: The Deeglise Cabin

When Francis Deeglise arrived in Antigo, he built a crude shack without any windows—a simple shelter for himself while he surveyed the area. This house stood near what later became north Superior Street (Highway 45), now Antigo's major roadway. The scooped roofed building (rear appendage) was built in February, 1878¹². It measured 16-feet by 24-feet and seven feet high. It was intended as a stable and served as a temporary home when the family arrived from Appleton on March 10, 1878¹³.

The Novotny Brothers sawmill opened in 1879, and with rough sawn lumber available, the scooped roof was removed, the walls raised several tiers, and a new gable roof was erected. A 10-foot by 16-foot log addition with a shed roof was then built on the left end as an office for Deeglise. It had its own door facing the street. A new stair replaced the original ladder which provided access to the upper attic space, and the windows and hardware were brought from Wausau and utilized.

A few years later a 10-foot by 24-foot frame wing was added at the rear of the building to serve as a kitchen and dining area and main bedroom.

The roof was likely sawn white cedar shingles on circular sawn pine boards. No soffit boards or fascia were ever used. All windows used double hung six-over-six sash type.

The family hosted services by Father St. Louis, attended by the entire community. A few original artifacts in the cabin included furniture pieces, pictures, and Deeglise's tripod and surveying equipment. The original cabin also possessed two corner logs on the right side used for hanging purposes. These logs were removed at some time and only one has been found and preserved.

However crude, this initial shelter was a paradise for the Deeglise family. Set near a beautiful spring, the river provided cool, fresh drinking water.

It is interesting that the home was never remodeled to become a showcase for a successful businessperson, as often happened. The Deeglise family built a second home in 1886, several blocks to the south and the cabin was used for other purposes. The cabin served for a time as the printing office for the New County Republican.

The original cabin was vacant at the time it was moved to the library grounds to be refurbished. No mention is made of Deeglise's dwellings in Appleton or Shawano,

but one might assume that the construction of his Antigo home followed previous and typical traditions throughout northern Wisconsin.

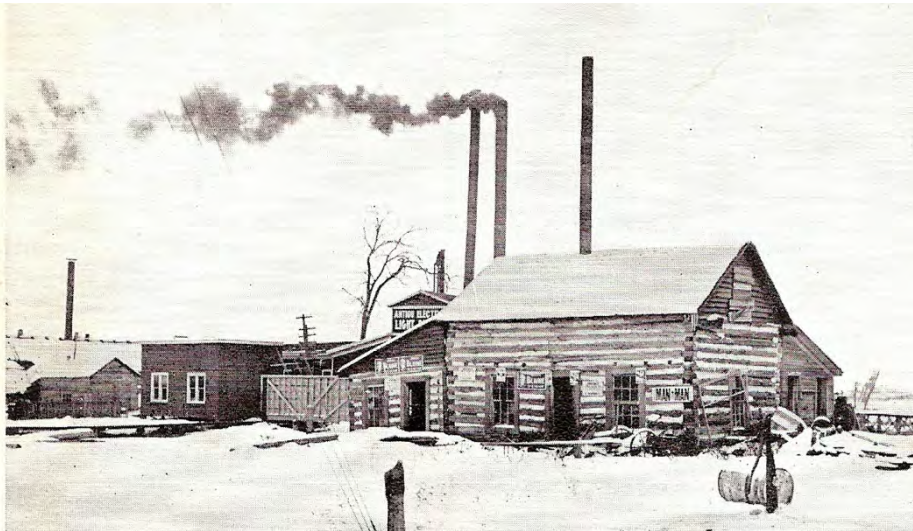
The cabin remains as a strong reminder of Antigo's past. Its highly visible location at the prominent southeast corner of the Historical Museum's site on Highway 45 makes it a draw for visitors and residents alike.



The path linking the Deeglise home to the Ackley home to the west became Fifth Avenue.

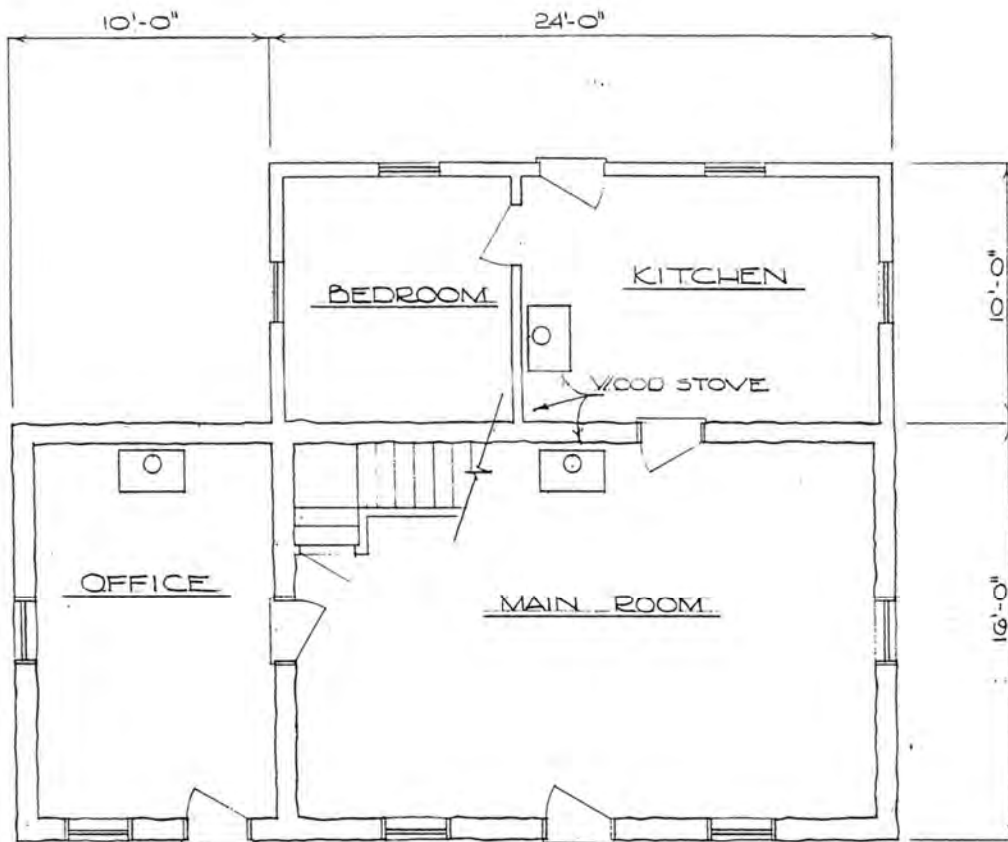


The cabin at its original location on the banks of Spring Brook near what is now Superior Street between Fifth and Fourth Avenues. Photograph of the cabin as it was in 1882.

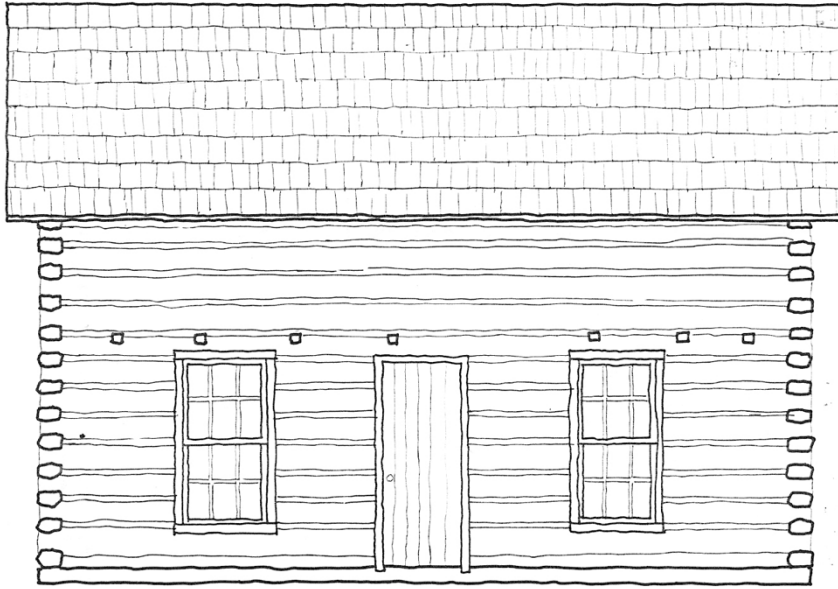


By the early 20th century the cabin stood in the middle of Antigo's industrial development

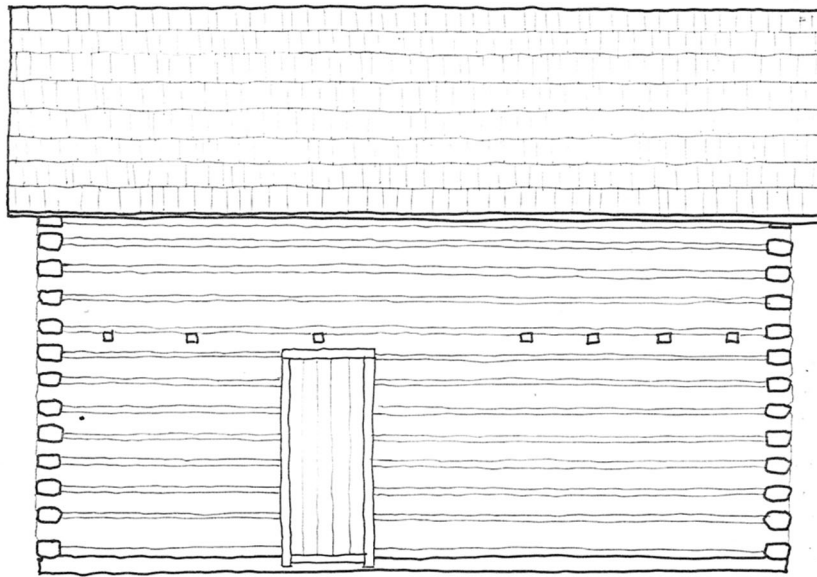
Elevations of the original cabin without additions. Illustrations by Julie Blazek



Cabin plan with additions. Illustration by Julie Blazek.

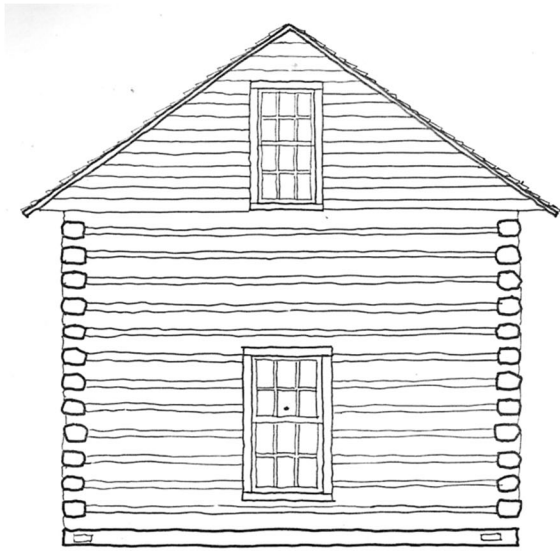


FRONT ELEVATION: DELEGLISE CABIN

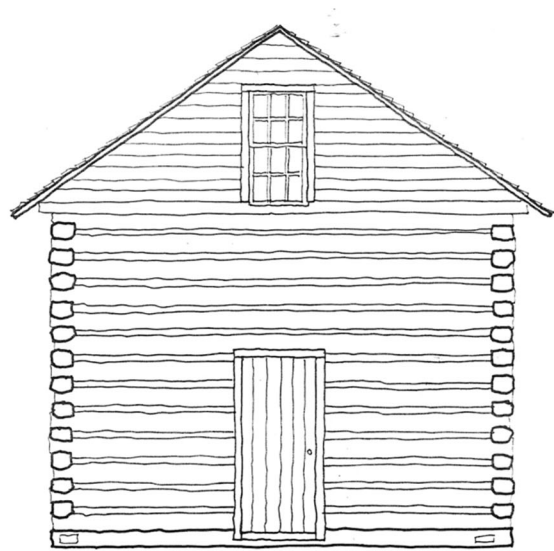


BACK ELEVATION: DELEGLISE CABIN

Cabin elevations prior to additions. Illustration by Julie Blazek.



RIGHT ELEVATION



LEFT ELEVATION

Cabin elevations prior to additions. Illustration by Julie Blazek.

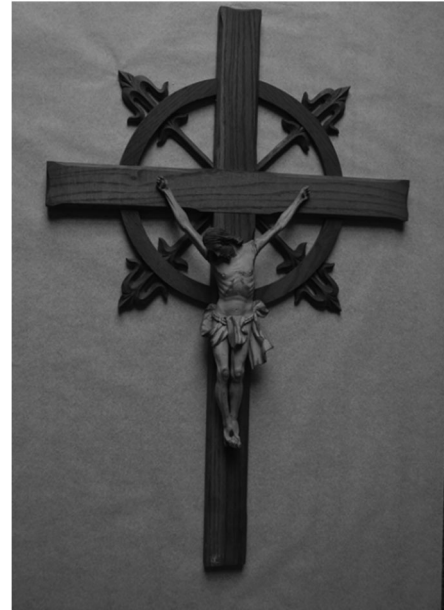
Inside the Cabin

This chest of drawers was made in Appleton, Wisconsin by cabinet maker Francois Bernard who came to Wisconsin from France in 1854. Francis Deleglise and his wife Mary Bor likely acquired the chest after their marriage in 1856 and move to Appleton. It was one of the items the family brought with them in their move to Antigo in 1879. Family history states that at the first Catholic mass celebrated in Antigo used this chest of drawers as an altar.



The altar came to Antigo via their daughter, Eleanor Grignon Navarre.

The altar and crucifix now in the cabin were made by Rev. Philip Mannes St. Louis in about 1874 in Menasha. Philip St. Louis was born in Little Chute in 1848. His sister, who came to own the altar, was married to Simon Grignon, a descendant of an early French fur trading family in the Fox Valley.



Preservation and Restoration of the Cabin

Francis Deleglise had the cabin built for his family in 1878. Originally one rectangular building, a small office of log construction, and a lean-to clapboard and frame kitchen and bedroom were added soon afterwards. The cabin originally stood on the west bank of Spring Brook and the family occupied the cabin until 1886, when they moved into a larger home.

In 1914, the thirty-six-year-old cabin was standing in the way of development. Local officials, rather than tear down the building, arranged to have it moved to the north side of the city library, a Carnegie building and now a museum which is on the National Register of Historic Places. The Wisconsin Historical Society cites this as one of the first, if not the first, efforts in Wisconsin of a community

preserving a log cabin and a part of its heritage. The office and kitchen additions to the cabin were not preserved in the move.

In 1998, the city opened a new library and ownership of the Carnegie Library and cabin were transferred to the Langlade County Historical Society. At that time, a major fundraiser was mounted to restore the cabin and reconstruct the office and kitchen additions. The restoration was done by Laib Restoration Inc. It involved disassembling the cabin, marking each log and reassembling it at a new location slightly closer to the road. Some logs were replaced by similar ones and of similar vintage since they were showing signs of decay. During the restoration, replicas of the two original additions were included.

In 2007, the museum completed the restoration of a steam locomotive and “Railroad Park” situated on the north end of the building. The cabin was moved to the south side of the museum and raised onto cinder blocks to help preserve the bottom layer of logs.



The 50th anniversary of the building of the cabin was celebrated in Antigo.

Moving the cabin down Superior street in 1914. Photograph by A.J. Kingsbury

2/3/98



FUND RAISER—Mayor Miles Stanke, seated at left, signs a proclamation supporting the Langlade County Historical Society's \$50,000 fund raiser to restore the Deleglise cabin. Also

seated is Lee Dinsmore, Society president. Standing from left are Joe Sveda, Steve Bradley, Jon Schmidt and Ed Morrissey, among those spearheading the fund raiser.

Fund drive for cabin underway

Plan restoration of Deleglise home

Antigo Daily Journal February 3, 1998

Langlade County Historical Society Board of Directors in 1998 at the beginning of the preservation effort.

Dean Blazek
 William Chylek
 Lee Dinsmore
 Jerome Filbrandt
 Lisa Haefs
 Virginia Klimoski
 Bernard Lazewski

Ed Morrissey
 James Roesner
 George Shinnors
 Jon Schmidt
 Elda Schrader
 Joseph Sveda



When the cabin was first moved to the library site the additions of the office and kitchen/dining room were not preserved. They were restored during restoration efforts in 1998.



In 2007 the cabin was moved from the north to the south side of the museum.



The Deleglise children who survived to adulthood: Left to right: Mary Deresch, Albert Deleglise, Anna Morrissey, Alex Deleglise and Sophie Leslie. Anna and Sophie did much to preserve the family history.

More Resources

Francis Deleglise's letters written to family members while participating in the Civil War may be viewed at:

<https://recollectionwisconsin.dp.la/search?q=deleglise&subject=%22United%20States--History--Civil%20War%2C%201861-1865%22&page=1>

The furniture pieces in the cabin are described at:

<https://recollectionwisconsin.dp.la/search?q=langlade+county+decorative+arts>

Footnotes and Bibliography

Footnotes

¹ Robert M. Dessureau, History of Langlade County Wisconsin (Antigo, Wisconsin: Berner Bros. Publishing Co. 1922) p.12.

² Malcolm and Margaret Rosholt, A Photo Album of the Past Pioneer Scenes and Portraits from Central Wisconsin Vol. II (Rosholt, Wisconsin: Rosholt House, 1977) p. 8.

³Dessureau, History of Langlade, P. 12.

⁴Ibid., p. 8

⁵Ibid., p. 103

⁶Ibid., p. 104

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹ Wisconsin Cartographers' Guild, Wisconsin's Past and Present: A Historical Atlas, pgs. 36-37.

¹⁰Larry Van Goethem, Not Long Ago:1879-1979 The Langlade County Centennial Story(Antigo: Larry Van Goethem, 1979)p.41, 42

¹¹Dessureau, History of Langlade, p. 104

¹²Description on museum picture, unauthored.

¹³Larry Van Goethem, Not Long Ago:1879-1979 The Langlade County Centennial Story (Antigo: Larry Van Goethem, 1979) p.104

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